

Jun 11, 2010

Washington, DC - Congressman Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) introduced the "Securing Protections for the Injured from Limitations on Liability Act" (SPILL Act) yesterday, a comprehensive bill addressing legal liability issues arising from the Gulf Coast oil spill. Braley visited Louisiana last weekend to participate in a Congressional field hearing on the local impact of the BP oil spill. Braley introduced the bill with Reps. John Conyers (D-MI) and Charlie Melancon (D-LA).

"As we continue working to stop the BP oil spill and clean up the disaster in its wake, we must also ensure the victims of this spill are fairly compensated for their trouble," Braley said. "At our field hearing in New Orleans, we saw firsthand that this spill is having a devastating impact on the families of the workers killed in the explosion, local fisherman and small businesses in the Gulf Coast. BP keeps saying they will make this right and this bill will make sure they do just that. One of the few requests made by Natalie Roshto and Courtney Kemp, the widows who testified at our hearing, was that Congress take the necessary steps to strengthen these laws and ensure their husbands did not die in vain."

The SPILL Act amends grossly outdated legislation, clarifies rules for class action suits, prevents corporations from silencing victims and strengthens bankruptcy rules to ensure corporations are held accountable for their actions for both pending and future claims.

The SPILL ACT will:

- Amend the Death on the High Seas Act and the Jones Act, dating back to 1920, to ensure the families of those killed in maritime accidents, like the widows who testified in Rep. Braley's field hearing earlier this week, can recover damages such as pain and suffering and loss of care, comfort, and companionship
- Repeal the Limitation on Liability Act, dating back to 1851, which limits the liability of vessel owners to the value of the vessel and its cargo
- Clarify the class action rules so that impacted States can seek legal remedies in their own courts
- Specify that victims cannot be forced to waive their legal remedies or limit their right to speak out. In previous hearings Braley discovered Transocean made these types of attempts following the Deepwater Horizon explosion
- Strengthen bankruptcy rules to prevent multibillion-dollar corporations responsible for widespread damages under the Oil Pollution Act from seeking to sever their assets in order to avoid compensating innocent victims

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